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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - SYRIA-LEBANON

ARAB SPRING - GREATER MIDDLE EAST

PARIS - THURSDAY, MARCH 24, 2005

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

SYRIA-LEBANON

ARAB SPRING - GREATER MIDDLE EAST

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

THE BOLKEINSTEIN DIRECTIVE AND PRESIDENT CHIRAC'S APPEAL TO THE PEOPLE OF FRANCE TO BACK THE EU CHARTER ARE TODAY'S MAJOR FRONT PAGE AND EDITORIAL STORIES. CATHOLIC LA CROIX DEVOTES ITS LEAD TO THE DECISION BY EUROPE'S BISHOPS TO BACK THE EU CONSTITUTION. LA CROIX ALSO CARRIES A DECLARATION BY MOHAMED BECHARI, SECRETARY OF EUROPE'S ISLAMIC CONFERENCE, CALLING FOR EUROPE'S MUSLIM POPULATION TO VOTE IN FAVOR OF THE CONSTITUTION.

THE LATEST BOMBING IN BEIRUT LEADS COMMENTATORS TO WARN AGAINST A NEW CYCLE OF VIOLENCE AND RENEWED DISSENSION BETWEEN LEBANON'S RELIGIOUS FACTIONS. IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER WEEKLY LE POINT, COLUMNIST PIERRE BEYLAU ANALYZES FRANCE'S PAST STANCE TOWARDS LEBANON, AND ITS PRESENT "LIMITED" ALIGNMENT WITH WASHINGTON'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS HEZBOLLAH AND SYRIA. (SEE PART C)

A REPORT IN LEFT-OF-CENTER WEEKLY LE NOUVEL OBSERVATEUR ANALYZES THE FEASIBILITY OF PRESIDENT BUSH'S "DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST." (SEE PART C)

LEFT-OF-CENTER LE MONDE CARRIES AN INTERVIEW WITH PAUL WOLFOWITZ ON HIS NOMINATION TO THE WORLD BANK. LEFT-OF-CENTER LIBERATION DEVOTES A TWO-PAGE PROFILE OF PAUL WOLFOWITZ, ANNOUNCED ON THE FRONT PAGE: "A HAWK AT THE WORLD BANK'S DOOR." PASCAL RICHE CONTENDS THAT "WOLFOWITZ, THE WARMONGER, WASHINGTON'S LEAD HAWK WHO IS ESSENTIALLY ONLY INTERESTED IN KEEPING AMERICA'S POWER ON TOP, DOES NOT HAVE THE PROFILE FOR THE JOB." IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER WEEKLY LE POINT, WASHINGTON CORRESPONDENT HELENE VISSIÈRE COMMENTS IN A TWO-PAGE REPORT ON PAUL WOLFOWITZ: "LIKE RUMSFELD, WOLFOWITZ PROVED INCAPABLE OF ANTICIPATING THE POST-WAR INSURRECTION AND OF PLANNING FOR IRAQ'S RECONSTRUCTION. HOW WILL HE BE ABLE TO MANAGE AN INSTITUTION THAT DISTRIBUTES 20 BILLION DOLLARS IN CREDITS A YEAR, WHEN HE DID SUCH A POOR JOB OF ANTICIPATING THE FINANCIAL AND HUMAN COST OF THE WAR IN IRAQ?"

A POLL CONDUCTED IN EUROPE ON EUROPE'S EXPANSION AND REPORTED IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE FIGARO INDICATES THAT IN FRANCE, 58 PERCENT OF THOSE POLLED FAVOR UKRAINE'S EU MEMBERSHIP, WHILE ONLY 37 PERCENT FAVOR TURKEY.

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

SYRIA-LEBANON

"DAMASCUS RETAINS ABILITY TO DO HARM"

GEORGES MALBRUNOT IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE FIGARO (03/24):  
"FORCED TO LEAVE ITS PRIVATE HUNTING GROUND, SYRIA RETAINS THE ABILITY TO DO HARM. THE SYRIANS DO NOT NEED TO BE PHYSICALLY PRESENT IN LEBANON. THEY CAN COUNT ON THE PRO-SYRIAN LEBANESE WITHIN THE POLITICAL CLASS AND THE LEBANESE ARMY. FOR THE TIME BEING HEZBOLLAH HAS RESISTED THE PROPONENTS OF LEBANON'S DESTABILIZATION. BUT HOW LONG WILL IT BE ABLE TO OPPOSE ITS SYRIAN AND IRANIAN BACKERS? AFTER THIS SECOND ATTACK AGAINST THE CHRISTIAN OPPOSITION, CHANCES FOR REPRISAL EXIST, ESPECIALLY IF GENERAL AOUN RETURNS TO BEIRUT. SINCE HARIRI'S ASSASSINATION, LEBANON'S OLD DEMONS HAVE RETURNED. IN A COUNTRY WHERE RELIGIOUS IDENTIFICATION IS STRONGER THAN NATIONAL UNITY, THE FRENCH AND AMERICAN PROMOTERS OF RESOLUTION 1559 MAY HAVE PROVED TO BE INCAUTIOUS. AS ONE EXPERT PUT IT, 'WE MAY BE PLAYING WITH FIRE HERE.'"

"A BELATED 'DISCOVERY.'

PIERRE BEYLAU IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER WEEKLY LE POINT (03/24): "ONE DAY, LO AND BEHOLD, CHIRAC DISCOVERED THAT THE SYRIAN ARMY WAS OCCUPYING LEBANON. UNTIL RECENTLY EVERYONE SEEMED TO ACCEPT LEBANON'S SYRIAN OCCUPATION, FOR FEAR OF A WAR. ONLY LAST YEAR DID FRANCE BEGIN TO OPEN ITS EYES. EAGER TO NORMALIZE

RELATIONS WITH WASHINGTON, FRANCE BEGAN TO LEAD IN UN RESOLUTION 1559. LEBANON THUS BECAME THE PRIVILEGED GROUNDS FOR RECONCILIATION BETWEEN THE FRENCH AND THE AMERICANS. BUT ONLY TO A POINT. BECAUSE PARIS, CONTRARY TO WASHINGTON, BELIEVES IT IS DANGEROUS TO EXCLUDE HEZBOLLAH FROM LEBANON'S POLITICAL ARENA. AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, FRANCE HAS NO DESIRE TO GET INVOLVED IN SYRIA'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS. IN OTHER WORDS, IT DOES NOT WANT TO GET INVOLVED IN ENCOURAGING A CHANGE OF REGIME IN DAMASCUS. THESE ARE TWO YELLOW LINES WHICH DELINEATE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FRANCE AND WASHINGTON'S POSITIONS ON THE LEBANESE QUESTION."

"A WELL-PLANNED BOMBING"  
DOMINIQUE BROMBERGER ON GOVERNMENT-RUN FRANCE INTER RADIO (03/24): "THE NEXT FEW DAYS WILL BE DECISIVE IN THE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE PRO-SYRIAN MOVEMENT AND THE LEBANESE OPPOSITION. THE SYRIANS WOULD BE DELIGHTED IF IT WERE PROVEN THAT WITHOUT THEIR PRESENCE TO IMPOSE LAW AND ORDER, THE LEBANESE ARE INCAPABLE OF LIVING IN PEACE. BESIDES THE COMING ELECTIONS, ANOTHER FACTOR THAT WILL PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IS THE REPORT THAT KOFI ANNAN HAS REQUESTED ON THE ASSASSINATION OF HARIRI. DEPENDING ON WHETHER DAMASCUS IS FINGERED OR NOT, THE REPORT WILL PLAY AN INFLUENTIAL ROLE IN THE BALANCE OF POWER. LEBANON'S AFFAIRS ARE BEING FOLLOWED VERY CAREFULLY IN THE ARAB WORLD. A VICTORY OF DEMOCRACY HERE WOULD HAVE CONSIDERABLE IMPACT IN OTHER NATIONS IN THE REGION."

#### ARAB SPRING - GREATER MIDDLE EAST

"TOMORROW, DEMOCRACY?"  
RENE BACKMAN IN LEFT-OF-CENTER WEEKLY LE NOUVEL OBSERVATEUR (03/24): "THE AMERICAN INTERVENTION IN IRAQ HAS TURNED THAT COUNTRY INTO A NEW POWDER-KEG OF ISLAMIC TERRORISM, WHILE ALSO TRIGGERING A MOVEMENT FOR REFORMS AND DEMOCRATIC ASPIRATION FROM EGYPT TO SAUDI ARABIA AND LEBANON. BUT HOW FAR CAN THIS ARAB SPRING GO..? IS THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION DOING WHAT IT NEEDS TO DO TO BE CREDIBLE IN ARAB COUNTRIES, WHERE THE POPULATION PERCEIVES WASHINGTON'S POLICIES AS IMPERIALISTIC? AMERICA'S DESIGNS FOR DEMOCRACY IN THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST ARE ALSO ENCOUNTERING DIFFICULTIES FROM EUROPE, AND ESSENTIALLY FROM FRANCE, WITH THE WARNING THAT IN THE ARAB WORLD, WEAKENING THE REGIMES COULD GENERATE CHAOS, AS WAS THE CASE WITH IRAQ. IS DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE MIDDLE EAST REALISTIC, IF THE U.S. AND ITS EUROPEAN PARTNERS CONTINUE TO HAVE DIVERGING VIEWS ON THE GOALS AS WELL AS THE MEANS?" LEACH